

What is New in Adoption

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DURING the last three or four years there has been a significant increase in the number of adoption agencies in California and consequently in the amount of agency adoption services. In 1947-48 when the new law authorizing public as well as private adoption agencies went into effect, only one out of every seven children was being placed by the agencies. The remainder were placed through other sources. By last year almost one out of four children was placed through agencies—an indication that people will turn to agencies when services are available to them. At the end of January 1952, 1,100 children under care of adoption agencies in California were in their adoptive homes awaiting completion of adoption and another 1,300 children were being studied for placement. As the newer agencies get into full swing, greater coverage will be possible and the percentage of agency adoptions can be expected to continue to increase.

In many areas throughout California interested citizens and agencies are reexamining the present adoption program in order to provide better coverage and make changes to otherwise provide improvements in service. More than two years ago through the generosity of the Columbia Foundation and the Rosenberg Foundation a sum of money was assigned to activate and organize the Citizens' Committee on Adoption of Children in California.

This committee, a statewide organization, and county citizens' committees in 12 counties throughout California were organized to determine what the citizens of the state consider to be and will accept as a sound adoption program. In order to answer this question, the committees have considered all the facts, criticisms and differences of opinion relating to existing adoption practices and on this basis have come up with a summary and recommendations. This has already accomplished a great deal of good in clearing the atmosphere and in providing a better working relationship between the adoption agencies and the various professional groups interested in one way or another in adoption.

The agencies also are taking steps to examine their own programs to see what changes can be made. California adoption agencies meet periodically to exchange points of view, share experiences and plan

• Adoptions arranged through adoption agencies are on the increase because there are more agencies. The Citizens Committee on Adoption of Children in California has concluded that there are very few adoptable children under care in orphanages. Fifty per cent of physicians would prefer agency adoptions, but only 24 per cent actually refer both expectant mothers needing such services and couples wishing to adopt infants to such agencies. The program in this field of social welfare should be child-centered and physicians should seek and give cooperation to such agencies.

programs designed to attain uniform standards and practices including more effective relationships with physicians and others in the community.

Following is a review of the current findings and criticisms of adoptions of children in California.

1. The supply does not meet the demand. For every baby available for adoption there are ten couples who want to adopt babies. A statement frequently made was that orphanages and foster boarding homes were filled with babies available for adoption. The Los Angeles County Committee conducted a study of all children under care in institutions and boarding homes, private and public. It was found that of 3,394 children under the age of 17 years whose cases were studied, only 105 were orphans in fact. Of 2,032 living in foster homes, 29 per cent were there because their homes were undesirable, 24 per cent because of the illness of a parent, and 16 per cent because the mother was employed.

Further analysis revealed 416 children who were rarely or never contacted by parents or relatives and who were therefore possibly adoptable, with difficulty. Two hundred twenty-nine of them were more than 12 years of age. Adoption agencies had started plans for adoption of 80 of the 187 who were less than 12 years old. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that there is not, in fact, a number of adoptable children supposedly being "hidden out" in institutions.

2. Real progress is being made in attempts to determine why many adoptions are arranged individually and privately without the services of a licensed adoption agency. The most frequent criti-

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cisms are of "red tape," long delay and overemphasis on meticulous matching of child to foster parent. As to the "red tape," it must be said in defense of agencies that they are child-centered. They attempt to perform a service of high quality, and with limited funds they have difficulty in moving rapidly in home selection and placement. Placement methods have recently been changed to permit the earliest possible placing of numbers of infants within a few days to a few weeks after birth. A real effort is being made to place children with minor handicaps, physical or mental, and children handicapped by background. No longer does a social worker consider only a perfect child eligible for adoption.

3. Probably the greatest contribution to the field of adoption by the Citizens' Committee on Adoption has been a survey of the position of physicians in this social welfare problem. It has sometimes been said that social workers have not received or given cooperation in this phase of welfare planning. The evidence indicates that 50 per cent of physicians preferred agency adoptions, but only 24 per cent actually referred to social agencies both the expectant mothers with social problems and couples seeking to adopt children. Thus, three-fourths of the physicians interviewed arranged for placement of babies directly with foster parents in order to satisfy their own patients. In so doing they centered their consideration on the adoptive parents and not on the baby. Obviously there is urgent need for continued discussion in the hope that physicians and social workers may resolve their differences by close cooperation.

4. The problem of difficult-to-place children of minority groups, from the viewpoint of race and color, is being studied by the Los Angeles County Adoption Agency and considerable progress has

been made in this direction. The Children's Home Society of California, the only statewide privately-supported adoption agency, is also working with this group.

5. Assistance to unmarried mothers is vitally needed. In the state of Washington the Children's Home Society has set up a program for the care of unwed mothers during pregnancy, delivery and the postpartum period. Physicians and hospitals are cooperating by rendering this service at a minimum fee. In California a similar project has just begun. This will be most important since, with this service available, there will be less reason for the so-called exchange arrangement in which care for the patient and the baby may be arranged by a third party.

6. Finances have limited the work of private as well as public agencies. The number of agencies charging fees has doubled in the last few years. One agency in California finances its program entirely through fees. The principle of a fee has even been written into law which established the county adoption agencies in California. It is expected that greater emphasis will be placed on this in the future. However, there are still differences of opinion as to whether or not the fee should be on a sliding scale based on ability to pay, or should be standard and sufficient to cover the cost of services rendered to the prospective adoptive parents, or sufficient to cover also part or all of the cost of service to the child and the natural parents.

It is recognized that the medical profession has a community responsibility as well as an ethical one. As such, it must take an active part, seek and give cooperation with the social welfare group. The adoption program must be child-centered, and the medical profession's aim should be to find the best homes for children—not just children for patients.

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